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The Tsimshian Monkey Mask and Sasquatch

This article examines the central importance of masks in the ritual dramatization of the personifications of power in Tsimshian mythology. The author suggests that the particular spiritual abstraction represented by the mask is activated by the wearer in the ritual. Masks which portray manlike monster figures confuse the distinction for the observer between mask and wearer in ritual and, consequently, between the spiritual and the human realms.

This paper was inspired by a mask collected about 1914 from the Niska Indians in the Nass River area of northern British Columbia by Lt. G. T. Emmons, which is now in the Peabody Museum, Harvard University (Plates 31 and 32). In documentation accompanying the mask Emmons wrote that it represented "a mythical being found in the woods and called today a monkey." Whether or not this mask is a portrait of a creature actually seen, it suggests to those who see it that it has some relevance to the Sasquatch, a zoologically unverified ape-like animal believed by both whites and Indians to inhabit forested regions of British Columbia. This paper is an excursion into the meanings behind the mask and an attempt to construct a symbolic framework within which we can apprehend Tsimshian thought on Sasquatch-like animals and compare it with our own.

Sasquatch "makes sense" in Tsimshian. We are looking for some way it can make sense, or be made sense of, for us. In anthropology we investigate those things which are problematic to us by looking for them elsewhere. From the perspective granted to us by others, we can sometimes see ourselves more clearly. Questions of religious symbolism and their relationship to hallucinatory experiences (that is, experiences accepted as real by the experiencer but not shared by others), most commonly found in drug-induced states, are becoming increasingly current in anthropological research. As long as Sasquatch is a personal rather than a collectively sanctioned experience it will remain hallucinatory as officially defined by Western culture. Since to behave as if one's hallucinations are real is one of the principal criteria by which medical scientists diagnose insanity, research into hallucinatory experiences

reflects a pervasive concern of our time and our culture with the problem of insanity. If Sasquatch were not of considerable interest to us, we would not be at this conference talking about it. If it were not of considerable interest to a great many other people as well, the press would not be here with us in order to report to them what we are saying. It might sometimes be treated as a joke, but as Keyes says, we do not often "stop to consider that a joke is never the least bit funny unless it is true."[3]

A good way to begin is by attempting a zoological classification of the creature represented by the Peabody mask. According to physical anthropologist R. D. E. MacPhee it does not resemble any known species of primate closely enough to be identified as a zoologically verifiable animal.[4] It does have primate attributes, four of which are especially noteworthy: the brow ridges, the shape of the nose, the distance between the base of the nose and the upper lip, and the prognathic, chinless lower face. The brow ridges appear from the photographs to be bow-shaped and sharply delineated from the forehead, a form replicated in many monkey species and quite unlike those of man, fossil or recent. The dished-out nose with its rounded, somewhat laterally directed nares is striking and is perhaps the best single monkey-like feature of the mask. While the large, mobile upper lip is prominent in apes, it is also characteristic of numerous monkeys. The prognathism of the lower face and its lack of a chin also strongly evoke the non-human primates. Such an identification is, however, counteracted by the lack of large canines, which are characteristic of every other primate except man. Comparing these and other attributes with those of both old and New World primates, MacPhee concludes that, except for the absence of prominent canines, "if the mask represents a monkey, the most likely model would be found among the short-faced monkeys of the Old World."

From a zoological perspective, then, the creature represented by the mask is an invented or anomalous form based upon an Old World monkey, but having human-like teeth. Since neither monkeys nor apes are native to British Columbia, the creature of the mask is likely to be a recent or post-contact invention.

Another mask collected from the Niska of Gitlaxdamiks in 1927 by C. M. Barbeau was also said to represent a "monkey". While its somewhat prognathic lower face and lack of a chin are suggestive of non-human primates, this mask does not have monkey attributes. Its facial proportions, nose, orbital area, lips, and forehead are quite well formed human features. Barbeau recorded a native name, *pi'kis*, as well as the following information about the performance of this mask:

> The performance of this naxnoq, when the name was assumed began in

> another house. The performer does not wear the mask at first. But when he comes into the feast house, he begins to act as a monkey, irresponsibly. He throws the headdress of some chiefs into the fire, and it does not matter how costly the misdeed may be to him, as he will have to compensate the owners. The next day, he calls the people to his house, wears the mask, with long hair on, and pays for the damage caused on the first day.[5]

This description identifies the "monkey" as a *naxnox* (power) name, customarily dramatized in masked performances, of which more below.

That *pi'kis* which was thought of as a monkey, but was also the so-called wealth or property woman who carried a crying baby, is attested in a Gitksan story recorded by Lt. Emmons at Hazelton:

> Pighish . . . was an animal closely associated with the land otter, although very human in appearance, and spoken of to-day as a monkey woman. The presence of Pighish was indicated by the cry of a child, for she always carried on her back a small being much like herself.
>
> Only one without fault could see this miraculous creature, and when the voice called, he was obliged to follow as the sun goes around four times, then he would come to Pighish. He then must take the child, which immediately appeared to be human. The mother pleaded for her infant and it was returned to her, whereupon she agreed to grant any wish asked. In returning the child, the face of the person had to be turned away as he stepped back, lest Pighish kill him with her long claws.[6]

In this story the *pi'kis* is an animal, but one which resembles humans. She is also said to be closely associated with the land otter.

In a Coast Tsimshian myth recorded by Henry Tate and published by Franz Boas, wealth woman is originally a lake woman who has a child with a human father.[7] She carries the child on her back and later goes into the ocean to become the sea monster *hagwelox*, described in this myth as "a being part fish, part woman." Before she leaves for the ocean she gives her wealth-bestowing power to her husband's sister, putting the sister's baby on her back and saying, "Whoever meets you, or whoever hears your child cry, shall be richer than anyone else." This myth thus divides wealth woman into two manifestations—a human and a sea monster. (The myth is examined in more detail below.) In another myth, also recorded by Tate, the female hagwelox is

a dangerous sea monster whose "beautiful child" floats on the water between two islands and functions as a lure to sea otter hunters.[9] The myth suggests a strong association between the otters and the floating child.

In unpublished field notes Barbeau recorded the Niska naxnox name *pa'gwus*, a variant of pi'kis, which he again glossed as "monkey," and of which he said: "they had a story that this monkey would confuse their minds and turn them crazy if they met it in the woods. The man using it imitated a regular monkey."[10] This strengthens the monkey/land otter association since meeting a transformed land otter person in the woods is the traditional Tsimshian cause of insanity.

Today the monkey is classified with the Sasquatch by the Coast Tsimshian who alternately gloss the word *ba'wis* (another variant of pa'gwus, pi'kis) as "monkey," "ape," "Sasquatch," and "Bigfoot."[11] It is significant for the argument to be developed here that the linguist John Dunn has discovered that the semantic range of the word ba'wis is extended to mean "any animal that can imitate human behaviour with great alacrity and deftness."[12] The word is borrowed from the Kwakiutl *bukwus*, usually glossed "man of the woods" or "wild man" by the Kwakiutl.[13]

The Gitksan identify another manifestation of wealth woman, a tiny bird named *wadaml* which has a loud voice that sounds like the cry of a newborn baby. In the "early days" it was necessary to take the child of wadaml away from her in order to obtain good fortune or luck, but today it is only necessary to hear the bird's voice. While the Gitksan now make a distinction between the bird wadaml and the woman wadaml with her crying baby, they suggest that "in early times" no such distinction was made. The perceptual similarity of the bird's voice to a baby's cry, in other words, the ability of the bird to imitate a human, was evidence of an anomalous creature, another existant which mediated the animal and human categories of being. The existence of a human attribute in nature, already a perceptual bridge uniting man and animal, was conceptualized as an anomalous being containing that unity, a concrete being which could be encountered by man himself in the woods or on the ocean when away from human settlement. It was a dangerous encounter since it was an encounter with power, but if a man conducted himself properly he could acquire some of that power and thereby acquire wealth.

By examining the nature of wealth woman in more detail, we can increase our knowledge of the ba'wis category and begin to understand why both the monkey and the Sasquatch have been lexically classified with her, thereby being "put in place" in the Tsimshian order of things. She is no simple or easily comprehended being, as we have already glimpsed, and in her animal dimension is alternately bird, otter, monkey, and whale. Her enduring attributes throughout her transformations are her fierce and possessive

motherhood, her crying baby, and her resemblance to a human. Her enduring function is to exchange the power to acquire wealth for the return of her child. She seems to exchange for her child only with men, except in one myth in which she shares her wealth-bestowing power itself with a human woman who has a newborn child.

In the two Coast Tsimshian myths mentioned above, either wealth woman or her child kills the people in a village where proper marriages are not taking place—in one instance where a prince refuses to marry and in another where brother-sister incest explicitly occurs.[14] Brother-sister incest seems implicit in the first myth as well. In this myth wealth woman is a beautiful woman of a lake and is herself the cause of a prince's refusal to marry one of his father's relatives, since he prefers his secret marriage with her. She makes him promise neither to take another wife nor to reveal their relationship "lest you die." When a friend who has spied on the prince discovers her and their child at the bottom of the lake, he takes the child back to its father's house, and it kills everyone in the village during the night by plucking out their eyes. Only the prince, his sister, and her newborn baby are spared. The prince then returns the child to its mother in the lake, saying in anger and sorrow, "Why didn't you take notice to whom you gave your child? This child has killed everybody in my village."[15]

What is it that the people of the village might see, to prevent which they are killed by having their eyes plucked out? If we consider that the following morning would present to the villagers the *apparent* relationships of the prince as a father to a child who has no mother and his sister as the mother of a child who has no father (she has no husband in the myth), the implication of brother-sister incest seems fairly obvious. Two children have been born to a man and his sister, apparently neither of whom have spouses. This implication is strengthened by the ending of the myth. After being rebuked by her husband, wealth woman gives him some magic gambling sticks and sends him away to the south. She then gives her own gift of wealth-bestowing power to his sister, puts the sister's newborn baby on the sister's back, and sends her away to the north. Having separated the prince and his sister, leaving the village entirely unpopulated, she enters a period of mourning in the lake, after which she comes up with her own baby on her back and goes into the ocean to become the monster hagwelox. The possibility that wealth woman and the man's sister are the same, or are different aspects of the same woman, strengthens the theme of incest already suggested by the two births.

In the second myth, wealth woman as hagwelox has been killing the sea otter hunters (the young men) of a village for "generation after generation." Her "beautiful child" floats on the water between two islands, one of which is the home of the sea otters, and functions as a lure to the sea otter hunters. When they rescue him, they are killed by his monster mother. In the final

sequence of the myth the only people remaining in the village are "one young chief. . . with his two nephews and his niece and the mother of these two [sic] young people."[16] Then two other nephews join them. "Now there were four young men, two women, and the chief."[17] They decide to kill the monster and set out in a magical canoe made of yew wood. The chief captures the child in the water and refuses to return it, saving himself and his family from the destructive wrath of the hagwelox by floating in the air in a magic canoe. The child dies while the party is on an island from which "there was no way to escape." The hagwelox then stops asking for her child while the chief "counted the days of his work" (in other words, he observed a hunter's taboos of sexual continence, fasting, and bathing).[18] Then one of the nephews "compelled his sister to have intercourse with him,"[19] after which she sends him away as a sawbill duck. The chief then kills the hagwelox and they go to a village where the men make proper marriages and bring their wives home: "thus the empty village was peopled again. . . and the island was free to those who wanted to hunt sea otters."[20]

In this myth, too, there is brother-sister incest within an isolated matriline unit which results in the depopulation of a village. This time, however, wealth woman and her child are killed by the head of the matriline. The men then contract proper marriage alliances with another group, and their village is repopulated. Also, in this second myth it is a murderous wealth woman who keeps the villagers away from wealth in the form of sea otters (with which her child is identified), access to which is restored after her death. The incest in this myth is explicit, and the chief who is able to kill the hagwelox does so after proper observance of a hunter's taboos.

My reading of these myths, and of the wealth woman aspect of ba'wis, is that they do in fact explore the dangers inhering in the close brother-sister relationship in a matrilineal, avunculocal system in which a man's sister's son is his successor. In such systems, the sister's son is temporarily "taken away" by another man, its father, and returned as a youth to its uncle and the matriline. Were a man to enter into a direct, incestuous relationship with his sister in order to father his own heir, death would result to the village as well as to his sister and her son (as in the second myth). Obversely, if a father were to attempt to keep his own son as his heir, thus *appearing* to be in an incestuous relationship with his sister, who is properly his heir's mother, death would again result to the village (as in the first myth). The danger is removed in both instances by the exchange of a man's sister in marriage with another man, creating the alliance along which her progeny move, temporarily, in one direction and other forms of wealth equivalent to her children move in the other. Wealth woman is the sister through which a man acquires both wealth and an heir if he gives both her and her child away to another man in a proper marriage alliance. She and her child are also the beautiful and dangerous

monsters who symbolize a brother's temptation to keep his sister for himself, thus fathering his own heir directly, or a father's temptation to keep his own son as his heir, thus perpetuating himself directly.[21] In both cases the myths explore the elemental tensions of matrilineal systems and show the dire consequence, death to the community, which would result from breaking the marriage rules.

Emmons was told that "monkey woman" was "closely associated" with the land otter, the animal most feared by the Tsimshian in traditional times and still considered dangerous today. While the myth just considered suggests an association with sea otters, the animal most often mentioned in myths and stories is the land otter. The sea otter has, of course, been virtually extinct since the early nineteenth century, which might account for its disappearance from the belief system. Prior to the European introduction of the monkey, the land otter was probably perceived as the most human-like animal in the Tsimshian environment. It is also anthropomorphized by non-Indians, who consistently describe it in terms of human qualities. A naturalist, for example, writes as follows:

> If an otter can't have fun doing something, it just simply won't do it. This might be an exaggeration, but only a slight one, for the otter seems to make light of nearly everything it does and is without doubt the most fun-loving of all of native wildlife. Whether traveling, feeding, or merely enjoying the family group, it finds time for fun and games. The otter seems to feel that life is just too wonderful to be overly concerned about anything, even things that most wildlife consider extremely serious business—such as eating.[22]

A zoologist writes that they "play like monkeys."[23] He also notes that they have an extensive sound repertory, of which the most characteristic sound "is a curious low grunting noise, in a very deep register, which certainly gives the appearance of being a form of conversation. . . . The effects of two otters thus conversing underwater is a very unusual one."[24] They also give raucous screams and make bird-like chirps and twitterings.[25] They show great affection for their young and will defend them at the risk of danger to themselves.

Sea otters sleep with their young folded in their arms, kiss them, and call them with "a voice like the wailing of an infant; and when the young ones heard their mother's voice, they wailed too."[26] They seem to have a rudimentary social organization and to be depressed by isolation. They play dead to escape killer whales.[27] They are one of the few tool-using animals, smashing mussels and sea urchins on stones held on their chests.[28]

Thus, whether we consider the combined attributes of both land and sea otters, or land otters alone, we are certainly dealing with an animal having the ba'wis ability to create a perceptual bridge uniting man and animal. In Tsimshian belief land otters have the power to transform themselves into simulacra of humans and to possess or "take away" the minds of those who encounter them and yield to their dangerous enticements. Whereas "only one without fault" could see wealth woman and her child, it seems that it was expressly those with "faults" who were most likely to see the land otter people.

Ordinary humans are vulnerable to land otter possession on the sea when they have capsized and are in danger of drowning and on land when they are in the forest thinking of a sexual partner. Possession is manifested by insanity which, if not cured by a shaman, leads to death. Shamans can survive land otter possession, after which they call upon the power of the animal, either by song or by returning into a possessed state, in order to cure illness and perform other shamanic feats, such as fire walking.[29]

The belief in the vulnerability of those who are drowning to land otter possession might derive from the condition of hypothermia, caused by the rapid loss of body heat in cold water. According to medical specialists, "hypothermia permits expansion of the short and unstable state observed just before death."[30] Its symptoms include "confusion and defective thinking"[31] which can manifest in behaviour considered insane in other contexts. For example, an acquaintance of mine who suffered from hypothermia while skiing took off her clothes and began running barefoot through the snow, experiencing subjective feelings of heat and great energy. It seems likely that someone in such a confused state might also readily confuse a human-seeming otter with a real human or, more generally, that hypothermic confusion due to cold water exposure was equated with the other confusions of "insane" behaviour resulting from other causes.

The danger of thinking of a sexually desired person while alone in the woods is that it gives the land otter an opportunity to take that person's place in one's mind, thereby manifesting in a human form. The sexual lure of the land otter people is mentioned as an explicit danger. When Chief Mountain of the Niska was becoming a shaman, he was approached by a beautiful girl who wanted to have intercourse with him. She gave him a power song and taught him how to control fire. When she left, he saw that she had a land otter tail. He later danced in her mask.[32] Someone from Kitkatla told John Dunn that once an otter who appears as a sexually enticing person embraces a human "they go into you and straight to your brain and gnaw away at it so that you become mindless and a were-otter too. You don't live too long after that happens to you. You start acting crazy; then you get sick and die."[33] A Gitksan woman said that intercourse with an otter woman "will make a man really wild until he dies, if the medicine man cannot do anything."

She then told the story of a girl who was "taken" by the otter of a lake. She had to be tied up by her family else she would run away to the woods in order to return to him. A shaman instructed her family to go to the lake and use the girl as bait to entice the otter so that they could kill him with a bow and arrow. He then instructed them to "cut the urine of the otter out" and squeeze it into the girl's mouth as she lay tied on the ground. After being forced to drink the otter urine, she could be cured by the shaman. People in myths use human "urine and poison and everything that is nasty" as protection against ghosts and malevolent beings such as land otters.[34] In both instances, that is, whether the urine is that of the human or the otter, it seems to function to maintain the distinction between the human and the non-human.

In a Coast Tsimshian myth about a man who vowed he would never succumb to the land otters, their lure is said to be food rather than sex.[35] When a canoe in which the man is travelling with his sister capsizes, she drowns and he swims ashore. The land otters transform themselves into people and approach in another canoe, but when the man throws their paddles into his fire, thereby turning the paddles into minks, the land otter people disappear and their canoe transforms into a driftwood log. He also refuses to yield to the blandishments of a land otter woman who offers him food, which would accomplish his transformation into one of them should he eat it. Then he recognizes the voice of his dead sister's ghost. "I ought not to be afraid of my own sister," he says to himself, and he accepts the harmless food she offers. After a month he is rescued.

This myth explicitly disavows that it is about brother-sister incest although the situation leads us to expect this to be its theme. Unlike "monkey woman," land otter woman is not a manifestation of one's sister. Her ghost, like anyone else's, will be taken by the otters if she drowns. The malevolence of the land otters is not a consequence of brother-sister incest then, but represents something even more dangerous. The interchangeability of offerings of food and of sex suggests that the category of this danger includes but is even more basic than misplaced or inappropriate sexual relationships. Since the two basic requirements of life are food and procreation, illusory substitutions of which are offered by the death-bringing otters, this danger appears to be one of an absolutely fundamental challenge to human existence.

Land otters have the ba'wis ability to so successfully create the illusion that they are human beings that they can entice real humans into sexual and commensal relationships.[36] Once humans have accepted the illusion, have surrendered to this elemental confusion between humans and animals, their human consciousness dissolves into madness and eventually death. As the human's identity disappears, his or her body transforms into the body of an otter. The non-human overwhelms and possesses the human. The transformed person, however, retains awareness of its human relatives and will

even help them, as when the drowned ghost of a man's sister appears in a myth and offers him harmless food.[37] Thus a biological link between the human and the animal is retained. The malevolent land otters even use the kinship link between humans as a lure, appearing to them not only as sexual partners but also as relatives. Among the Tlingit, children are especially vulnerable to land otters who appear as their parents.[38]

Other animals, and non-humans generally, are offended by human biology—sex, excrement, and menstruation—and will only approach humans who are in a condition of purity. Thus hunters, shamans, and initiates are required to bathe, fast, and practice sexual continence before a non-human encounter will occur—in opposition to the pollution which attracts land otters. A hunter's wife can pollute him by not observing menstrual taboos or by having sex with another man while he is away. According to Garfield "the contamination of sexual intercourse was abhorrent to supernaturals . . . [and] the continence of hunters was particularly stressed."[39] Boas writes that "without any doubt, the general injunction of sexual restraint was binding upon all hunters."[40] Gitksan shamans today admit that their lack of power stems, at least in part, from over-eating.

Since successful gambling is also evidence of supernatural favour, the following Gitksan story heard in 1976 illustrates the contaminating nature of human biology to those who grant power. An unlucky man lost everything he possessed in the gambling game *laal* (the bone game). He left his family and went into the woods in a state of anger to die. At night he came to a shack where he heard a woman singing a baby a lullaby (perhaps a wealth woman). Without looking around at him, she called him into the house and bathed him. She used wood chips to scrape dirt off his body. Then she scraped off moss, such as is used in diapers. His wife, she said, had not washed her hands after changing the baby before fixing him food. Then she scraped off dirt mixed with blood. His wife, she said, had not washed her hands during her menstrual period before feeding him. For these reasons he was unlucky at gambling. The woman in the hut was a naxnox. She taught him about the taboos so that he would thenceforth know what to do, stating "This is the reason for menstrual taboos."

The breaking of her menstrual taboos will not only contaminate a woman's husband, it apparently can also cause her to become insane through land otter possession. The word *mu'watsa* (literally, "like a land otter")[41] is glossed in English as "crazy" or "insane" and is applied to persons whose minds have been "taken by" land otters, that is, who are possessed. The symptoms of insanity include talking to people who cannot be seen by others (hallucinating). Insane persons are also said to be "wild." They can be cured by shamans, at least in some instances. Barbeau recorded the following song

on the lower Nass River. It is called "mu'watsay" and was sung over a woman patient:

I am possessed. No one can cure me.
The salmon is in the same creek as the tabooed woman.
I do not recognize the small spirit (*narhnoq*).
I do not recognize the small spirit (*narhnoq*).
I am possessed.
It touches my ribs, where my body grows weak.[42]

It was added as an explanation by the singer, "I don't know the name of the spirit that touches my body; I don't even see it. I am crazy!" The song was explained as follows:

The patient here is supposed to be a woman.
To recover from her sickness she must abstain
from things forbidden to a woman under taboo.
Otherwise she would die. The term *ha'wak*
[taboo] means to abstain or refrain from anything.
The woman who infringes the taboos (while in her
period) will die and be with the salmon in the
creek, where she will really get lost.[43]

The shaman who owned this song had as a helper the salmon and he had a very small carving to represent it, which is probably the "small spirit (*narhnoq*)" referred to in the song. Such carvings were placed on the patient's body ("it touches my ribs, where my body grows weak"). At their first menstruation, women are forbidden to eat fresh salmon.[44] Although we do not know the conditions under which this song became an appropriate cure, it specifically relates land otter possession to the breaking of menstrual taboos and the curing of insanity to restoring proper observance of them.

One of the principal symbolic functions of these beliefs seems clear enough for the purposes of this paper. They serve to maintain the boundary between the human and animal realms at dangerous points of intersection. These can be defined as those points where similarities between beings in the two realms diminish critical differences between them. When ba'wis animals

imitate humans, they transgress the boundary onto the human side. Here they have the power to bestow wealth or death and insanity, depending upon how they are encountered by humans. If wealth woman is approached by one who is "without fault" and who knows who she is, she gives wealth. If, however, the illusory enticements of the land otters are accepted, they pull humans over to the animal side, where their humanity dissolves. Persons who have already diminished their humanity or not yet achieved it—children, the drowning, men and women who break sexual taboos—are subject to the dangerous contagion of their resemblance to animals. Similarities between humans and animals create openings in the separation of their realms through which the superior powers of the non-human can erupt into the precariously structured human order and overwhelm those who have released them. Separation between the realms is maintained by cultural control of human biological functions: eating and defecating, sex and menstruation. Safe encounter with the non-human realm depends upon the supression of these functions by men through purification of the body and by women through observance of menstrual taboos. Since possession by animals, or one's animal nature, is a transformation tantamount to death, control over human biology is an attempt to control human mortality. The most common form of death to a fishing and sea mammal hunting people—drowning—is classified as an unregulated biological function also resulting in land otter possession, just as does unregulated sexual conduct. He or she who would encounter death and survive—hunters, shamans, initiates, and menstruating woman—must scrupulously attend to the purity of the body. When out of control, the powers of nature can kill.

This interpretation can also be applied to power encounters in masked rituals, where humans themselves take on the forms of cosmic forces. While space precludes a detailed exposition of the rituals, they are such highly condensed symbolic statements that their relevance to the argument of this paper can be readily presented.

Masks are worn in the dramatization of naxnox or "power" names, in which the personifications of power are impersonated by humans. In the impersonation, the human merges his or her identity with the power being itself. As Goldman says of the Kwakiutl: "to receive the attribute [power] one must also become in some measure the source being."[45] He adds that the transformation is not, however, a "total transformation, but a masking transformation; it is always known that another human being is beneath the mask."[46] With the Tsimshian, where the relationship between the human and the power being is even more explicitly one of identification through both mask and name, we can be more precise as to what a masking transformation is. Although we have already seen that the Tsimshian wore masks of ba'wis (including wealth woman and monkey; also land otter woman

Plates 31 and 32), the key to understanding their masking lies in the fact that the majority of Tsimshian masks, and the names they embody, are human. The masks typically have even a portrait-like quality, although they are not representations of particular persons. They are the faces of naxnox, the faces of power. Fortunately, we know the names of over six hundred of them, which permits us to construct a composite picture of the qualities of power.[47]

Most of the names are of some human attribute, action, or category of person, such as Crippled, Deaf, Laughing Continuously, Choking While Eating, Always Having Intercourse, Corpse, Stranger, Slave Woman, all of which are negative aspects of the ideal or positive Tsimshian person. In performance they are often humorous, although audiences are also reported to cry in a state of fear and terror. The names are owned by lineages and dramatized by their members when they are assumed, after which they are often (especially among the Gitksan) used as secular names in everyday life. The dramatizations are performed for the guests before a potlatch as a demonstration of the power of the lineage, as well as for entertainment. Most performances consist of a simple acting out of the quality of the name (for example, Deaf cannot hear; Laughing Continuously keeps laughing), although more elaborate performances are reported for earlier times.[48] It is common for the performer to attack or insult visiting chiefs and to otherwise act out the quality of the name upon the audience; for example, in the performance of Sleep, the power of sleep is thrown upon the audience who all close their eyes. The masks themselves are believed to be dangerous. Henry Tate wrote of a mask named Boiling Words that "it was a very terror among the common people, and it was a great cause of pride among the princes and princesses to be allowed to touch it."[49]

Thus, as a first approximation, we can say that power resides or is located in the negative of the human, that it is inherited, and that it is activated when humans assume its attributes through masquerade. The range of the negative is extensive, from nonsensical actions, such as Throwing Mud, to death itself, as Corpse. Since all names are equivalent insofar as they are all personifications of naxnox and share the same ritual context, we must assume that the animal names also represent the human negative. The naxnox name Part Porcupine, for example, was also the name given to children who were born with deformed feet. That is, the animal naxnox refers to the same kind of physical infirmity as many of the human naxnox, or stands in a metaphorical relationship to them. The previous exposition of the interaction between humans and land otters in the naxnox Land Otter Woman is a particularly strong expression of the negative dimensions of the ideal human, especially the equation of animality with unregulated sexual activity.

The relationship between name, or perhaps more properly "name-title," and person has not yet been well studied on the Northwest Coast, although

it is discussed in some depth for the Kwakiutl by Goldman.[50] Kwakiutl names are the essentially autonomous spiritual essence of ancestors. The relations between persons and their names are reciprocal: "the name cannot fulfill its power-laden destiny without a carrier, the person without a name is incomplete"[51] The acquisition of names for the Kwakiutl was a spiritual obligation: "by reifying the name the bearer was giving the ancestor and the supernatural being life among man. In return he insured his own life and indirectly that of his lineage fellow."[52] Just as we have seen with the land otters, Goldman believes that the being of the name wishes to manifest in the human realm. A significant difference between the Kwakiutl chiefs' names and Tsimshian naxnox names is that the Kwakiutl names "would seem to sum up Kwakiutl character,"[53] whereas the Tsimshian names would seem to sum up character in reverse.

It requires but a short jump from the nature of the name to the necessity of the mask. Just as the land otter needs a receptive human in order to materialize in human form, to manifest in another realm, so does the naxnox. It manifests corporeally in the mask worn by a human. Just as the movement from the non-human animal realm to the human requires a relationship of similarity or contagion between an animal and a human, so does the movement from the non-human spiritual realm to the human. Power, like land otters, can manifest in humans insofar as it can find a reflection of itself in the human—thus naxnox masks as receptacles of power are human or human-like. Just as does the land otter, power finds its reflection in those aspects of the human normally suppressed by cultural edict, including aspects of biological mortality and cultural insanity. That humans are required to purify themselves by suppressing their biological functions before power is manifested can be interpreted as keeping the resemblance from becoming too strong, as in land otter encounters. We might think of mirrors existing in the non-human realms in which these qualities of the human are reflected and magnified. When the reflection is recognized by the human, the human in turn becomes a mirror (or a mask), and the doubly reflected quality achieves independent existence. The human wearing the mask is pure spirit, an abstraction given concrete expression. The moving mask is power given form.

By bringing the negative and positive dimensions of themselves into juxtaposition with the mask, the Tsimshian achieve unity and the experience of power. It is important to remember that this is a collective or ritual experience, as opposed to the ba'wis and land otter encounters which occur in isolation. To experience the negative alone is to risk becoming overwhelmed by it; to experience it in ritual is to experience it in the security of the collective. Shamans can survive the lonely journey into other realms, ordinary mortals cannot.

In Tsimshian thought, then, Sasquatch is an animal whose resemblance

to human beings is close enough to confuse the boundary between animals and humans. It is as "real" as a monkey, but also as "real" as wealth woman who assumes different shapes. Thus the Tsimshian cannot answer the question of whether the Sasquatch is real, as we pose the question. Indeed they do not perceive its resemblance to humans in the same way that North American Sasquatch witnesses do. While each ba'wis animal has some perceptual quality which "appears" human, the essence of ba'wis is that it is found throughout nature, although most malevolently concentrated in the land otters. It is found wherever man catches a glimpse of himself in nature, including in his own birth and death.

There are, however, a number of parallels and similarities between the Tsimshian Sasquatch and our own which might stimulate some new questions about the phenomena. When they are compared some of the essential features of each become clearer. First, both creatures exist at dangerously close intersections between the human and animal. In Tsimshian the animal's resemblance to the human can be transformed into an illusory human by the co-operating eye of someone who is already too close to the animal realm. That is, to see the Sasquatch raises questions about the moral purity of the witness. Similarly, in North American culture there are witnesses who sign affidavits attesting to their character and sobriety. John Green discusses a Mr. Tyfting who "was a man whom I already knew, and whom I know to have a good reputation in the community."[54] It is not just a matter of what is seen, it is a matter of who sees it.

Just as seeing a land otter person can drive a Tsimshian insane, people who see Sasquatches are reluctant to admit it, fearing to be labelled drunk or crazy. Green writes that "the people who know you well would ask you what you had been drinking, or at best they might take you seriously enough to start worrying about you."[55] A woman whose son reported seeing Sasquatch told me with some anxiety that "he wasn't that kind of boy."

Except for Albert Ostman, who was briefly captured by Sasquatches and ate some sweet-tasting grass they gave him,[56] North Americans are not reported to have either food or sex with Sasquatches. However, there are stories of Sasquatch-human interbreeding in Russia, and North Americans joke about having sexual intercourse with it.

Just as the Tsimshian believe that to see ba'wis as wealth woman is to become wealthy, there is a rumoured million dollar prize for the first Sasquatch captured in North America. On the other hand, both wealth woman and Sasquatch seem to appear to people who are not looking for them.

North Americans who believe in Sasquatch want very strongly to have its existence validated and explained by the scientific establishment; indeed, they often berate scientists for ignoring the creature and not mounting scientific expeditions in search of it. There is a need for consensus, which is

perhaps to be expected in a democratic society which exalts conformity, but this need also reveals the strong control that science holds over our collective reality. It is popularly believed that Sasquatch will not exist until scientists say that it does. Since, however, there is no category in Western culture for creatures who mediate the animal-human realms, scientists have no category for the Sasquatch to exist in. Those few scientists who do accept it tend to place it in the category of a human predecessor which somehow managed to survive.

Finally, Tsimshian beliefs about ba'wis can be interpreted as expressing aspects of themselves that they normally deny but cannot eradicate. If the Sasquatch does the same for us, if it is our mirror, it is a rather sorry picture we find of a large and hairy beast with big feet who smells absolutely terrible.

The burden of my argument, however, has been to show that the Tsimshian have a quite different conceptualization of intermediate human-animal beings than the one we embody in Sasquatch. This is to be expected, since we live and think in terms of different cultural realities. In both cultures, though, there are beliefs that the normally distinct realms of the human and the animal can fuse or confuse into an order of being which has a special and unusual existence or form of manifestation. Such beings are sources of fear in both cultures, although to the Tsimshian they are also manifestations of the divine to be sought out in the collective security of ritual action. In embodying both the human and the animal realms, whether as a relic fossil or "missing link" or as a quality of ba'wis manifesting throughout nature, the Sasquatch is a recognition of the connection between the human and the natural.

Notes

1. Peabody Museum, catalogue no. 85877.
2. See, among others, Peter T. Furst, *Hallucinogens and Culture* (San Francisco: Chandler and Sharp, 1976) and Theodore R. Sarbin and Joseph B. Juhasz, "The Historical Background of the Concept of Hallucination," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 3, no. 4 (1967): 339–58.
3. James Keyes [G. Spencer Brown], *Only Two Can Play This Game* (Toronto, New York, and London: Bantam, 1971), p. 4.
4. Personal communication, 1976.
5. Royal Ontario Museum, catalogue no. HN-687.

6. George T. Emmons, "Tsimshian Stories in Carved Wood," *American Museum Journal* (November, 1915): 365–66.
7. *Tsimshian Mythology,* Thirty-First Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1916), pp. 154–58.
8. Ibid., p. 157.
9. Ibid., p. 221–25.
10. C. Marius Barbeau and William Beynon, unpublished fieldnotes, 1915–1957, on deposit at the Centre for the study of Canadian Folklore, National Museum of Man, Ottawa.
11. See Bruce Rigsby, "Some Pacific Northwest Native Language Names for Sasquatch Phenomenon," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 5, no. 2 (1971): 154, and John Ascher Dunn, "A Practical Dictionary of the Coast Tsimshian Language," mimeographed, 1976, entry 141.
12. Ibid.
13. Rigsby, "Names for Sasquatch," p. 154, and Bill Holm, *Crooked Beak of Heaven: Masks and Other Ceremonial Art of the Northwest Coast* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 41.
14. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* pp. 154–58 and 221–25, respectively.
15. Ibid., p. 157.
16. Ibid., p. 223.
17. Ibid., p. 224.
18. Ibid., p. 448.
19. Ibid., p. 224.
20. Ibid., p. 225.
21. Compare Brad Campbell, "The Shining Youth in Tsimshian Mythology," in *Proceedings of the Second Congress, Canadian Ethnology Society,* Canadian Ethology Service, Paper no. 28 (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, Mercury series, 1975), pp. 86–109.
22. Edward Park, *The World of the Otter* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), p. 1.
23. C.J. Harris, *Otters, A Study of the Recent Lutrinae* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), p. 281.
24. Ibid., p. 192.
25. Ibid., pp. 4 and 5.
26. Ibid., p. 240.
27. Ibid., p. 271.
28. Ibid., p. 257.
29. See C. Marius Barbeau, *Medicine-Men on the North Pacific Coast,* Bulletin no. 152, Anthropological Series no. 12 (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1958), pp. 44–57, and Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* p. 563.
30. Vojin Popovic and Pava Popovic, *Hypothermia in Biology and Medicine* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1974), p. 194.
31. Fred T. Darvill, *Mountaineering Medicine: A Wilderness Medical Guide,* 7th ed. (Mount Vernon, Wash.: Skagit Mountain Rescue Unit, 1975), p. 24.
32. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* p. 563. Emmons collected a Land Otter Woman mask from the Nass about 1900–1914. (National Museum of Canada, catalogue no. VII-C-1778). It has a broad nose and prominent teeth and resembles a human skull.
33. Personal communication, 1976.
34. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* p. 452.
35. Ibid., pp. 345–46. This is common in Tlingit myths as well; see Frederica De Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias: The History and Culture of the Yakutat Tlingit,* Smithsonian Contributions to Anthropology, Vol. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1972), pp. 745–47.
36. In case it might seem that the connections between *ba'wis,* wealth woman, and land otter people are weak, we can find them cohering in the single figure of *bukwus* among the Kwakiutl. In Kwakiutl myths bukwus is the chief of those who have died by

drowning (see Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Tales, New Series,* Columbia University Contributions to Anthropology, vol 26, pt. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), pp. 24–25, *Kwakiutl Ethnography,* ed. Helen Codere (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 131–32; Boas and George Hunt, *Kwakiutl Texts I,* Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History, vol. 5, Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. 3 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1905), pp. 429–31, and *Kwakiutl Texts—Second Series,* Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1906), pp. 249–70; C.F. Newcombe, "The Wild Man Mask (Buquɛsɛmtl)," Field Columbian Museum Kwakiutl Notes, no. 46, item. no. 85816, British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria; and Diane Iona Persson, "Mask, Myth and Ritual: An Analysis of Interrelationships on the Northwest Coast" (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1974) His body is cold, "just like ice, for he was indeed a dead person" (Boas and Hunt, *Kwakiutl Texts I*). He takes the shape of a women's lover and has sexual intercourse with her, taking her to his village where she eats his food, and he then takes possession of her heart. She begins to change, her face becoming ugly, although she still has the capacity to help other humans who are threatened by bukwus. His helpers are land otters who transform into people. He is described in the documentation for one of his masks as half-human, half-bird: "to the man belonged most of the face, the hair and the beard; to the bird, the hooked nose and feathers of the head" (Newcombe, "Wild Man Mask," p. 2). He could fly and "make people lose their strength and go crazy whenever he wished." He was a child whose cry is like a whistle (Boas and Hunt, *Kwakiutl Texts—Second Series*). He bestows wealth and shamanic power which is lost by a shaman when he has too many children (Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*). The domain of the bukwus and the domain of the Tsimshian land otter are the same, although the two cultures differ in the details of its imagining.

37. That Tlingit land otter victims help their human relatives is well documented in De Laguna, *Under Mount Saint Elias,* p. 748.
38. Ibid., p. 747.
39. Viola E. Garfield, "The Tsimshian and Their Neighbors," in *The Tsimshian Indians and Their Arts,* ed Viola E. Garfield and Paul S. Wingert (Seattle and London: Washington University Press, 1966), p. 40.
40. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* p. 449.
41. Dunn, "Dictionary," entry 1549.
42. C. Marius Barbeau, "Tsimshian Songs," part 3 of Viola E. Garfield, Paul S. Wingert, and Marius Barbeau, *The Tsimshian: Their Arts and Music,* Publications of the American Ethnological Society no. 18 (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1951), p. 21.
43. Ibid., p. 122.
44. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* p. 531.
45. Irving Goldman, *The Mouth of Heaven: An Introduction to Kwakiutl Religious Thought* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), p. 200.
46. Ibid.
47. I discuss this in "Seeing in Stone: Tsimshian Masking and the Twin Stone Masks," forthcoming in a Wilson Duff memorial volume edited by Donald Abbott.
48. Boas, *Tsimshian Mythology,* pp. 554–58.
49. Ibid., p. 555.
50. Goldman, *Mouth of Heaven,* pp. 56–62.
51. Ibid., p. 57.
52. Ibid., p. 58.
53. Ibid., p. 61.
54. John Green, *On the Track of the Sasquatch* (New York: Ballantine, 1973), p. 11.
55. Ibid., p. 99.
56. Ibid., p. 28.

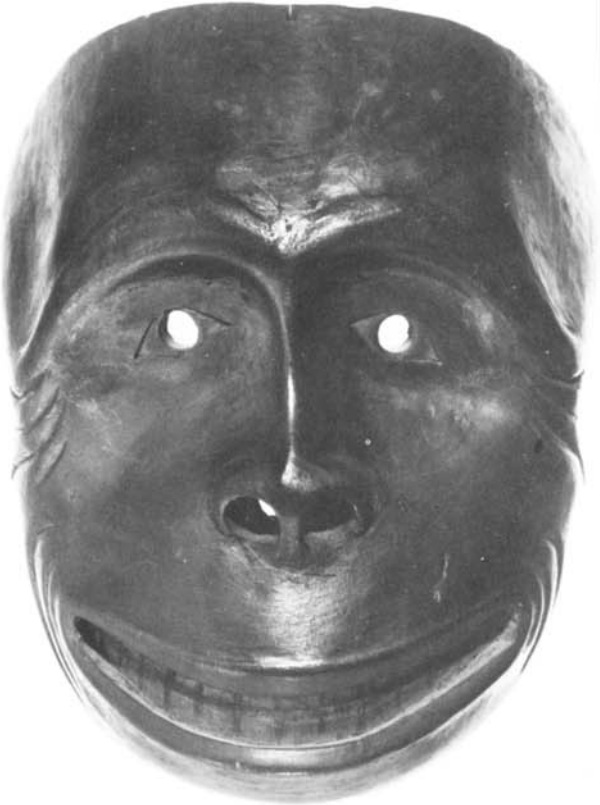

Plate 31. Front view of a mask collected about 1914 from the Niska Indians in the Nass River area of northern British Columbia by Lt. G.T. Emmons.

Plate 32. Side view. Emmons wrote that it represented "a mythical being found in the woods and today called a monkey." Marjorie Halpin discusses the link between this mask and Sasquatch on pages 211-28.